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**INDIAN RURAL, SETTLEMENT SURVEY INSTITUTE**  
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**SACRED TOPOGRAPHY SURVEY PROGRAM**

**M1**  
**- MANUAL FOR RESEARCH -**

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**“Deprayag” / Near Parimal Cross Rds./ Ellis Bridge**  
**Ahmedabad : 380 006, India (phone : +91-79-443 461)**

## INTRODUCTION: SOME THEORETICAL ASPECTS

### Cognition

There is a deep-rooted contradiction in the scientific approach of Western or European humanities. On one hand, science claims to be based on objective principles, that is to say empirically object-oriented, neutral in regard to subjective opinions and values, generally acceptable for scientific cognition. But on the other hand, in the interculturally comparative level, its results create a hierarchically structured system of values that contribute essentially and fundamentally to worldwide intercultural problems on the level of politics and international contacts. High religion - primitive religion, high art - primitive art, and particularly economically and politically: first world third world.

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Many members of the scientific world are impressed by this age-old buildup of European knowledge based on a history of more than 2000 years. Only few scientists of the humanities realize the factual weakpoints of this system, which works with many delimitations to keep its rationalistic methods feasible: myth, mysticism, irrational, pre-logic, pre-socratic thought, primitive etc. but also the 'irrationalism' in the fine arts, in music and poetry. These are all domains to which in fact analytical science - by definition - has no access.

In this context of cognition theory the present approach is based on the hypothesis, that, in the anthropological framework there are two coexisting systems of human cognition, the analytical or rational system (what is called science) and the much older and much more widespread one, what we call the >harmonious system of cognition<. The scientific system proceeds by separating different categories (black OR white), the second synthesises contradictions to harmonious units (black AND white). In the natural sciences, particularly in microphysics this has been discussed long ago (Niels Bohr, principle of complementarity). Both systems are absolutely incompatible, the scientific system works with the basic formula  $1 \neq 2$ , the latter  $1 = 2$ . The fact that the scientific approach excludes the harmonious system without understanding its essence is one of the basic problems in many disciplines of the humanities (ethnology and its subdisciplines, e.g. ethnology of religion, social anthropology).

This is one of the purposes of this survey: to use objective methods in the description of an emic value system (rites as local ontology) which avoids conventional approaches of Western humanities and thus manages to show that rural or tribal societies structure their environment according to harmonious principles (coincidence of opposites, complementarity, polar harmony).

This is very important. It would mean that we would have to accept the fact of two absolutely incompatible cognitive systems of equivalent value. If we merely favour the analytic conditions, we destroy the harmonious system a process which is clearly under way in the West and creates enormous problems.

### Concepts of space.

Another fundamental problem of the Western or European approach of the humanities is the concept of space. Medieval European scholasticism introduced Neoplatonism as the basis of its metaphysics and theology. Spatially this concept was extended into cosmic dimensions during the age of discoveries (14th/15th centuries and on). Bollnow (1963, see Annex) clearly showed that pre-modern space concepts were not cosmic in the modern sense; but were essentially related to experienced territorial dimensions, environmental, originally related to the clearance of wilderness for human settlements. Interesting in this context is the etymology of cosmos and cosmetics. The latter originally meaning a well balanced order in the human domain, remained on the human face, the former followed the history of discoveries into the universe. The history of cartography too speaks in favour of Bollnow's anthropological concept of space.

Therefore, most of what Western philosophy produced in terms of idealism or metaphysics is prejudiced in this sense. The same is valuable in regard to myth and religion. In fact, it makes a great difference whether we translate an ancient Babylonian creation myth with an extended space concept, whence it describes the creation of the universe in the modern sense. On the other hand, if we presume Bollnow's anthropological concept of space, the same text describes the foundation of a settlement.

In **this** context our research intends to show that what Western history of religions terms as 'primitive belief' in rural and tribal society corresponds in fact to age old systems of securing local dwelling space, using semantic systems which appear in the frame of highest local values, are part of a local ontology which implants man harmoniously into his environment.

### **The Western concept of the human past**

Western Humanities and their fragmented disciplines are based on historically grown paradigms. The middle ages conceived the human past entirely based on written history, that is to say, on the Old Testament. Jerusalem was considered the first city, hebraic writing the beginning of script. Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, calculated in the early 17th Ct. that from the evidence in the Ancient Testament it was possible to declare that the earth had been created in 4004 B.C. (Glyn Daniel, *The Idea of Prehistory* 1962)

This was questioned later by the discovery of many races all over the world and exotic cultures which contradicted the concept of creation of the Ancient Testament. Geology later provided a new periodisation which suggested processes of millions of years. Similarly the finds of physical anthropology showed that man had evolved physically, and similarly culture had gone through developments which were much older than some thousand years. Archaeology has greatly deepened our understanding of the human past, but has cemented the historical method (extended arm of history): only dated remains are considered as valuable sources in prehistory. But, evidently, this becomes a tremendous speculation, if based on scientific arguments (e.g. hand as the first 'tool') - we maintain that perishable material culture was culturally important.

In addition the archeological standpoint creates great scientific problems: the human tradition is devaluated in terms of sources (Compare e.g. material culture in an ethnological museum with that of an archaeological museum was all that was not durable just very recent?). Result: Western 'prehistory' reconstructs the human past essentially on remains (or 'rubbish', that is to say things often of no value in the spiritual sense). Western prehistory a great misconstruction? Merely a legitimization for technological progress?

### **The Western concept of religion**

Even in scientific domains few people realize the intimate relation of Western theory of religion with concepts of space. On the basis of Bollnow's anthropological concept of space, the Ancient Testament becomes an antique constitution, a bilevelled synthesis based on the state concept of Egypt and the Ancient Near East in its evolved aspects (e.g. Egypt: development of local, regional and finally 'pharaonic' state cults) and the more elementary concept of herdsmen of those times (eternally burning thornbush). This antique state constitution was borrowed during scholasticism for a neoplatonic construction which after the fall of the Roman empire conserved Roman centralism with an absolutely spiritual world constitution. Primarily based on the Roman centralistic concept of empire and this system was greatly extended during the age of discoveries, where it became global and cosmic. The whole postmedieval history of Europe and the West turns around this gravity point, conditions its tremendous centrifugality. Europeans have lost their centre.

### **Concept of art**

The Western concept of art is theoretically a product of the breakdown of medieval values and metaphysics. Greek philosophy supported a new humanism in the rich commercial towns of upper Italy, medieval belief shifted towards a human creator, the genius, the artist. Painters, architects, became famous, remember the great names like Leonardo and Michelangelo. At that time the first diabolic art critique, Pietro di Aretino was there too, Tom the first instant, This structure >artist- oeuvre - and the highpriest< who on one hand praises his deified genius on the other judges him and explains his religion to the laypeople was preserved practically intact until now, in all art discussions it remained basic. Thus beauty remains a deductive mystery but also, and the scientist of art is an ardent guardian of this thesis, it guarantees him the total subjectivity in his judgments.

For Western architecture - considered as art - this myth of the architectural genius produced a process of city

building which went completely out of control. If, as we said at the beginning, there are two incompatible cognitive systems, the analytical and the harmonious, the art historian becomes someone who would try to understand the beauty of art with a knife! He analyses what cannot be analysed, reduces to its components what has its essence by being contradictively composed to harmony. The most disastrous impact on our urban environment comes from the art historian's history of styles. The absolutely secondary changes of the art of building through different phases became the dominant aspect, ended in eclecticism in the 19th century. The springboard for modernism. With the help of geometry, aesthetics were ousted far away from man himself, were projected on machines. A theoretically important term was 'function' which cut art off from its history, allowed architecture to reduce itself to concepts like the facade being an expression of the building's entrails (Poorly designed backyards of Renaissance palazzi look very modern!). We probably will need another 20 or 50 years to really understand what tremendous human degradation modernism in architecture really was. And, finally in art, is it not a sad state of things that the modern Western mind needs an art-critique (a scientist!) who e.g. in the news daily has to explain 'what is going on' in art?

These are some characteristics of the Western system and its roots. It produces tremendous problems intra and interculturally. Most peoples recognize these problems, but see them in isolation, not on the common ground of an analytical thought principle which on all levels splits the world apart (analysis, anatomy, 'dissolve', cut apart; see Egenter 1988). However, there is another cognitive system, opposed and incompatible to the analytical science. It does not separate opposite categories in judgements or definitions, but unites them into harmoniously conceived polar units. One of the important goals of the present research is to show that this harmonious system of the "coincidence of opposites" is not only a historically ancient system of thought in India, but that it has more deeper roots in the village of Indian prehistory. This age old cognitive system which unites contradictory opposites has been dominantly used in various ancient cultures of Asia, like India, China, later also Korea and Japan. Further it should demonstrate that objective truth of the human condition cannot be constructed merely on rationalisms, but is an anthropological problem which has to be searched for in the human tradition.

If therefore this research program produces positive results, we might be able to understand that the Euro-Western scientific worldview, in many respects, is not necessarily the best in regard to the human condition.

### SOME BASIC TERMS AND VIEWPOINTS OF THIS APPROACH

There are some fundamental theoretical and methodological concepts in this approach. We will in the following shortly outline them.

1) **SPACE.** Western science works basically with the space concepts of physics and astronomy evolved in Western history. But its use in cultural discussions is highly problematic, particularly in cultural history where the anthropological space concept is the general condition. It leads to great distortions. O. F. Bollnow has elaborated on this anthropological concept of space (see Annexe). The anthropological concept of space allows us to look at the Indian village per se, without apriori relations to (Western) scientific concepts like religion (local ontology), social structure and so on. Our work becomes truly related to what we survey, inductively trying to find characteristics for our initial hypotheses.

2) **STRUCTURAL HISTORY.** This is a method which was developed in Vienna (Wernhart) in a circle of ethnologists, historians and prehistorians. It questions the results of dated history and suggests structural history as counter method which focusses on the vital human condition, ethnology and folklore research. There it develops certain ideas of what could be important. And then it uses history and archaeology to support the initial hypotheses. Thus of interest is not a synchronic section of a certain time and then a casual serialisation of such sections, but definitely searching for important continuities, e.g. constructive behaviour and organisation of space as we do it in our architectural anthropology. Thus we have a definitely ethno(pre)historical outlook.

3) **BILEVEL SURVEY.** Much - not very fruitful - discussion was done on the terms diffusion and parallelism and their impacts on culture. The large-scale view of this discussion covered up that it is a basic tension in each settlement. Diffusion and parallel developments are polar forces of any human environment. Constituting existential values tend to be constant, peripheral values may change or may be superimposed from outside. The object culture of a settlement

often shows a clear bilevelled picture. Paper and basketry, for instance, though often found together at the same place represent two very different diachronical levels. In this way separating various levels of material culture, we **can often reconstruct** traits of a settlement “before there was paper” (and writing) and thus understand original conditions and meanings.

4) **MATERIAL CULTURE.** If we do not rationalise in absolute Western terms, then materia and mind must have been closely interwoven as this is still the case in art and aesthetics. If man keeps technically evidently very ancient things traditionally alive, things which incorporate his highest ontological values, then we must try to understand the relation between such things and the environmental conditions and the ideas of the corresponding persons.

5) **FIBROCONSTRUCTIVE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS.** This term refers to studies done by the author in rural Japan which suggests the importance of a type of elsewhere widely vanished type of building, semantic architecture. In Japan semantic architecture (what religion called spirit huts, fetishes and the like) suggests an archive of the local settlement history related to the local spatial layout, is of high importance to village politics and shows highest ontological values within this settlement. In the framework of architectural anthropology it appears as a type of building which must have been widespread in many ancient cultures (lifetrees of Mesopotamia, early script of the Sumerians). We have many reasons to assume its significance in prehistory. We can even assume a prelithic >fibroconstructive age< in prehistory, during which man used fibroconstructive signs to spatially structure his environment for orientation. Since these perishable signs showed definite structural qualities they became symbols, models for a local world. Evidently they protected settlements or parts of it, not just against bad spirits, but against neighbouring man. Such marking systems can easily be seen as an early type of territorial consitution.

6) **CULTURAL THEORY BASED ON THE GENESIS OF SETTLEMENT.** This approach attributes great importance to the relatively isolated dwellings and settlements in pre-urban prehistorical rural society, agrarian as well as collectors and hunters. The structures developed particularly among neolithic and metal-age settlers and had great impacts on what we call culture. Conventional methods do not depict this cultural state of the rural settlement, the farmer culture is devaluated from the urban standpoint. Prehistory **forms** the basis for a rigid modern belief in progress which in fact might be just the contrary: a dangerous regress.

7) **CULTURE.** The term culture is localised and becomes objective: the culture of a rural village with its rites, cults, aesthetics, with its way to support its own existence, its local social hierarchy, its values, its philosophy, its local ontology. We can objectively describe all these phenomena. We then can proceed to larger units, finally speak of the culture of a nation. The studies done in the settlements will give us many valuable hints for the understanding of essential traits that characterise larger units of culture and civilisation.

8) **HISTORICAL RELIGION/ TRADITIONAL ONTOLOGY.** This distinction is very important. In the bilevel-view of our approach we distinguish between a historically derived religion and a locally traditional ontology. Religion implies belief. Conventionally, traditional societies were interviewed on their beliefs. But this method is misleading, it distorts the factual situation. The essential in the local ontology is not belief, but the rites, the behavioural tradition that has been handed down from times immemorial. In this way, local ontology reveals to be much more complex than conventionally thought. We uncover a complex system of social, spatial and ritual structures with their diachronical implications. The rites and cults performed in the **particular spatial** environment of a particular settlement are the message that counts.

9) **SACRED TOPOGRAPHY.** This term is used in allusion to L. P. Vidyarthi's term >Sacred geography< (The Tribal Culture of India, 1976). The anthropological space concept used here is fairly close to what geography reports about a village. On this basic grid provided by the tectonic structure of the landscape, the local dwellers spread their value system. Some domains are highly sacred, others less. Thus what Vidyarthi considered sacred topography becomes a readable system of local values. These places are reenacted **during related** cults and festivals. The settlement becomes a kind of stage on which the local inhabitants become the actors to communicate to us outsiders how they think and live. Probably we may understand after some time that they live in a very beautiful world, which long ago had vanished for the urban dweller.

## CONCLUSION

We tried to describe the basic motives behind this research. Though it might look narrow-focussed to some reader, it is supported by a wider anthropological horizon. It is further supported by the author's conviction, that this method has a strong intercultural outlook, touches lines of development which have deeper roots than usual historical or verbal legitimations of cultures. In this sense it is probably very close to what we call anthropology. An anthropology of human settlement.

In the Annexe the reader and researcher will find a paper of the author on O. F. Bollnow's book >Man and >space (1963) which is basic for the approach outlined here. And further the English part of a monography is added, which was done by the author in rural Japan. It is an introduction to this research program.